(a) whether he has launched the first credit rating system for small and medium scale enterprises;

(b) if so, whether the move is aimed at ensuring higher availability of bank and institutional credit to the small and medium enterprises sector;

(c) whether the nodal agency for the project would be the National Small Industries Corporation; and

(d) if so, to what extent this rating system has been helpful for the small and medium enterprises?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes, Sir. A Performance and Credit Rating Scheme for small scale industries has been launched on 7.4.2005.

(b) credit rating enables banks to have accurate information on creditworthiness and, therefore, induces banks to increase the quantum of credit as well as lower the interest rate on advances to small and medium enterprises.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) As the scheme has been launched in April 2005 only, it is too early to assess its impact at this stage.

Establishment of repair facilities

*22. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether as a pre-condition to placement of orders for Boeing/Airbus, India has sought foreign investment in civil aviation sector by establishing repair overhaul and maintenance facilities in India;

(b) whether Boeing Airplane Co. and Airbus Industries have committed to invest around Rs. 1,000.00 crores on Indian facilities for maintenance, repair and overhaul of their aircrafts in India; and

(c) whether around 150 Boeing aircrafts are expected to be inducted by the Indian carriers over the next three years and if so, whether financial viability of establishing an MRO venture in India has been confirmed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION

(SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) The fleet acquisition proposal of Public Sector Enterprises are not yet finalized. Issues relating to counter trade/offset commitments are taken up as part of the process of finalization of the Purchase Agreement.

(b) and (c) While media reports have appeared in this regard, there is no such information available with the Government.

US's concern over Indo-Iran Pipeline Project

†*23. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indo-Pak-Iran pipeline project has reached the crucial stage now;

(b) whether United States of America has expressed its disagreement about the said project;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor;

(d) whether any talks have been held between him and U.S. Secretary of State in this regard; and

(e) if so, the outcome of talks?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) The Government is discussing the details of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project with the Governments of Iran and Pakistan. The discussion is progressing satisfactorily.

Two separate Secretary-level Joint Working Groups (JWGs) viz., the India-Iran special JWG and the India-Pakistan JWG, have been constituted to discuss the "financial, technical, commercial, legal and related issues to realize a safe and secure world-class project" as stated in the Joint Press Statement issued by the Ministry of Petroleum of India and Pakistan at Islamabad on 7 June, 2005. A copy of the Joint Press Statement may be seen at Statement-I (*See* below).

The first meeting of the India-Pakistan JWG was held in New Delhi on 12-13 July, 2005. Both sides stressed their "serious commitment" to address various issues pertaining to the project and agreed that once

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.